



Indianapolis

Gregory A. Ballard, Mayor

Remarks to the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Water Council

Greg Ballard, Mayor of Indianapolis

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(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you Mayor Hosterman.

Welcome to Indianapolis. I hope you enjoy your time with us.

As Co-Chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Water Council, I am honored to host this conference on Modernizing City Water Infrastructure and Delivery.

As you know, we recently hosted Super Bowl 46. It was a fantastic event, and the City of Indianapolis delivered. But it was all about showcasing our city during a fixed event in time.

The publicity was certainly great, but what we're doing here today and tomorrow is more consequential ... in many ways ... for the City of Indianapolis, for cities across the country, and most importantly, for our residents ... than the Super Bowl.

It impacts the long-term physical health of our citizens and our community, as well as the long-term financial health of our cities.

Our conference theme is focused on a look towards 2020. To me that means continuity. So right now, I want to dig into what that means.

As mayors, everything we do should be about continuity.

Short-term, that means, 'Do you pay the bills on time? Do you fill your potholes and mow the grass in the public right of ways? Do you respond quickly to constituent concerns? Basically, do you keep the city up and running in the here and now?'

Truly, Mayors and City Managers have the most direct responsibility for results of any elected official. Mayors and their staffs are the boots on the ground for all immediate needs, and for all deliverables in most municipalities.

From a longer-term perspective, there is another ... and in my opinion ... more important continuity that falls to a Mayor.

It is more global, more holistic in nature. It is tending to, and grooming the long-term wellbeing of the City. Making a city one to which businesses will flock and flourish, and where families will thrive.

It involves a long view of the role of the Mayor ... something not always palatable in an environment where you tend to be judged in short increments ... in my case, four year periods.

In Indianapolis, I always make decisions ... particularly financial decisions ... with an eye to the welfare of our city some ten-to-50 years out.

It is quite a balancing act. Operating a city today ... and meeting the needs of your constituents ... while planning for the future prosperity of your City.

As you know, Indianapolis' now historic EPA consent decree renegotiation proved to be an intricate blend of the here and now, and the future.

We addressed the long-term clean water needs of our community better, sooner and cheaper through the renegotiation, without raising taxes on Indianapolis' citizens of today, and without taking on debt loads that would burden our future residents.

In fact, later this month we kick off construction of the Deep Rock Tunnel Connector project ... engineered to keep billions of gallons of raw sewage out of the city's waterways.

And we're achieving our clean water a full ten years sooner than we would have under the original 2006 consent decree. We're saving close to \$1B off of the original price tag to boot.

And during the process, we got some real short- and long-term non-water-related wins for our City as well.

By transferring Indianapolis' waterworks to a public utility company, for example, we removed close to \$1.5B in debt from the city's balance sheet and de-politicized waterworks in the city. I know that can be a chronic headache for Mayors.

We also gained more than \$400M to address Indianapolis crumbling roads, bridges, sidewalks and other infrastructure through the transfer. Many new roads incorporate sustainable storm water technology, and save the city countless dollars on annual pothole repair costs.

In fact, year-to-date we've seen an almost 75% drop in pothole repair requests compared to 2011. And we're getting those repairs done a full 7.5 days sooner!

And some of the city's most chronically neglected neighborhoods now have sidewalks and curbs, after decades of requests and pleas for them. This program ... known as RebuildIndy ... has become a tool for widespread economic development and rejuvenation throughout the city.

Wins for today ... wins for tomorrow ... and clean water to boot.

There are other important short- and long-term wins we're anticipating here in Indianapolis. The cultural and economic implications for this coming clean water are huge.

In addition to providing cleaner water for our residents, our waterways can ... and will ... become assets for economic and community development throughout Indianapolis.

Already, a group of is preparing for this coming era of cleaner water ... with a multi-million dollar project called Reconnecting to Our Waterways, designed to embrace and develop the waterways that weave our neighborhoods together.

The project is being driven by several community leaders from both the private and public sectors, including local universities, Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, the Central Indiana Community Foundation, and the City of Indianapolis' Office of Sustainability.

The renegotiations have been a boon for other reasons as well. By resolving a burgeoning budget-busting problem in partnership with the EPA, my administration has been able to focus on other things to draw businesses and talent to our city.

And by that I mean we've been able to truly implement sound fiscal stewardship. We've made a lot of headway – stabilized environment, balanced budgets, reduced the debt – all things that make Indianapolis an inviting place for small businesses, for entrepreneurs.

That's why our companies are staying here, and growing here. And that's why companies in other cities want to talk to us ... and want to move here.

And what goes for those with established companies moving to town goes for local entrepreneurs as well. A stable environment ... no big tax surprises ... either for individuals or businesses ... is really important for business success. It's pretty simple.

For better or for worse, our jobs as Mayors are never done.

And even with our EPA renegotiations behind us ... maintaining strong and functioning water and wastewater systems will continue to be a priority. There will always be maintenance, there will always be urban growth, and there will always be technology upgrades. That means we must keep our focus on maintaining our systems, both for today and for tomorrow.

We know it is crucial for the public health and the environment, crucial for our quality of life, and crucial for the future growth and development of our cities and municipalities.

At the same time, we must look forward those 10-50 years I spoke of ... to ensure the regulations implemented today don't strangle our cities' futures.

The quality of water in America's cities today is amongst the safest and cleanest in the world, and is the envy of the world. We must not forget that, and we must not forsake that.

I look forward to engaging in these conversations today and tomorrow as we act now to modernize City Water Infrastructure and Delivery for the future.

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